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RUEHUM/AMEMBASSY ULAANBAATAR IMMEDIATE 0714
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002596

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TAGS: [ASEAN](#) [ETRD](#) [PREL](#) [EXBS](#) [AU](#) [IZ](#) [APEC](#)

SUBJECT: THE DEPUTY SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH AUSTRALIAN FM
DOWNER

Classified By: Deputy Secretary John Negroponte, reasons 1.4 c, d

11. (C) SUMMARY. U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte and Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer discussed U.S. involvement in Iraq and Secretary Rice's attendance at the upcoming Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministerial Meetings in Sydney during an August 1 meeting on the margins of ARF in Manila. Foreign Minister Downer expressed his support for a continued U.S. military presence in Iraq and requested that the Australian Government be informed of any planned shifts in U.S. policy towards Iraq. END SUMMARY

LEVEL OF U.S. MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN IRAQ

12. (C) Foreign Minister Alexander Downer opened the discussion by observing that the U.S. was engaged in an intense domestic debate over the future of its role in Iraq. The FM sought clarification on whether the American military commitment to Iraq might change in the months ahead. This is of particularly importance to the Australian Government because of approaching elections in November. FM Downer's greatest concern was of any "sudden moves" in U.S. policy in Iraq prior to the November elections. The FM visited Iraq approximately one month ago and said that he would be "horrified" if the U.S. were to suddenly leave or downsize its presence in Iraq significantly. The Australian Government's decision to support the U.S.-led invasion and its continued presence in Iraq remain unpopular with many Australians. However, the FM and the Australian Prime Minister were committed to continue arguing the case to the Australian people because they truly believe it is the right policy.

13. (C) The FM said that he had received signals from the Pentagon that the U.S. was considering "changing the mission" in Iraq and asked what impact that might have on the Australian presence in Iraq. He expressed his support for U.S. military commanders in Iraq, in particular General Petraeus, and suggested that the Australian Government was perhaps "a little jumpy" because of British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's current U.S. visit, given British military sentiments on its continued role in Iraq.

¶4. (C) FM Downer shared his personal belief that the 2003 invasion of Iraq was justified when considering what the world would be like today if Saddam Hussein were still in power. He also praised Australian-U.S. military cooperation in Iraq and elsewhere. The Deputy Secretary and FM Downer acknowledged the challenges facing the U.S. in Iraq and how this was affecting political discourse in the U.S. They both agreed that the large majority of Iraqis would not favor a sudden withdrawal of U.S. forces.

¶5. (C) During FM Downer's recent visit to Iraq, he held two meetings with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Malaki in which he stressed the need for the Iraqi government to demonstrate reconciliation among competing religious and ethnic groups. FM Downer believes that Iraq faces a problem common to many developing countries in which people regularly vote along sectarian lines: the group that loses the election feels they will continue to fall behind in the democratic process, which only deepens their sense of alienation. He gave the example of Zimbabwe to reinforce this point while commending President Jose Ramos Horta of East Timor for working to ensure an inclusive government.

¶6. (C) FM Downer expressed his appreciation for U.S. leadership in Iraq and other parts of the world in instances when a strong American role is required. But unfortunately, he said, local populations and global public opinion often refuse to fully appreciate American contributions. The FM assured the Deputy Secretary that anti-American sentiments were not rampant in Australia.

SECRETARY OF STATE'S ATTENDANCE AT APEC MINISTERIAL MEETINGS

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¶7. (C) The discussion moved to Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) where the U.S. Secretary of State's attendance at the upcoming Ministerial Meetings in Sydney would be very much appreciated. FM Downer suggested it would be ideal if the Secretary of State would attend the Ministerial Meetings for the full two days. The FM concluded by saying that Iraq and APEC were the two primary issues that he had wanted to focus on during the bilateral meeting. The Deputy Secretary of State confirmed that he would keep Australia informed of developments with respect to Iraq and APEC.

¶8. (C) August 1, 2007; 10:30 AM; Manila, Philippines

¶9. (C) Participants:

U.S.

John Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State
Ted Wittenstein, D/Sec Staff Member
Colleen Kelly, D/Sec Staff Member
Kevin Donahue, U.S. Embassy Manila (USAID), note taker

AUSTRALIA

Alexander Downer MP, Foreign Minister
H.E. Tony Hely, Australian Ambassador to the Philippines
Andrew Golezdzinski, Senior Advisor to the Foreign Minister
Tony Parkinson, Senior Advisor to the Foreign Minister
Gillian Bird, Deputy Secretary
Peter Callahan, Assistant Director General, AusAID

KENNEY